Seminar in Syntax: Experimental Syntax  
Fall Semester 2014  

ENGL 627 / LING 629  
MWF 1:30-2:20, Heav 102  

Instructor  
Dr. Elaine Francis  
Office: Heav 202A  
Office hours: MW 2:30-3:30, MWF 11:30-12:00, or by appointment  
Email: ejfranci@purdue.edu  
Tel: None. For urgent matters, you may call the English dept. main office at 494-3740.  

Description  
Increasingly, theoretical linguists are using experimental methods to gauge linguistic knowledge. This course introduces basic concepts of experimental design and explores how experimental methods may be used to answer theoretical questions in syntax. Students will evaluate theoretical and methodological aspects of current research articles and will also have the opportunity to design their own experiments. Specific topics and readings will be determined in part by the research interests of seminar participants.  

Some of the issues we will address in the course are as follows:  

- What is experimental syntax and why do we need it? Why conduct experiments rather than simply using our own intuitions or those of a native-speaker consultant?  
- What do acceptability judgments mean and how can we interpret judgment data with respect to theoretical problems in syntax?  
- When we design an experiment to investigate a syntactic problem, how can we be sure our data really get at the relevant issues? What are the potential factors influencing a particular linguistic phenomenon, and how do we control for extraneous factors?  
- How do experimental data inform the analysis of word order alternations, island violations, event structure, and other syntactic phenomena?  
- What are the boundaries of the competence grammar? How can we decide whether an apparent grammatical constraint is really a manifestation of frequency effects or of semantic, discourse, and/or processing factors?  
- How can experimental research on language processing, language acquisition, bilingualism, language disorders, and neurolinguistics inform our understanding of the competence grammar?  
- Besides acceptability judgments, what other techniques can linguists use to study grammatical phenomena in competence and performance?
Blackboard Learn

- The Blackboard Learn course web pages will be used to distribute notes, assignments, handouts, and readings, and to post grades and other important course information and announcements.

- To access Blackboard Learn go to: http://www.itap.purdue.edu/learning/tools/blackboard/

Class Format

- The class will consist primarily of reading and discussion of book chapters and research articles. Class activities will also include demonstrations of research techniques and hands-on practice with data collection and analysis.

Requirements

Class Participation, Attendance, and Written Responses 25% / 250

- To get full credit for class participation, you must attend each class, participate in class activities and discussions, complete the assigned reading before class, and bring a written response to each class session for which there is an article presentation (this pertains to most class sessions, see syllabus).

- Your written response should consist of a set of written comments pertaining to the reading(s) assigned for that day, with the main purpose being to facilitate critical discussion in class. It should be at least one page, double spaced or one-half page, single spaced. It does not need to be organized in essay format. Bullet points or numbered items, as well as questions and sentence fragments, are acceptable.

- Your written comments will be checked off for completion at the beginning of each class, and will not be graded for content. However, no credit will be given if I see that your response does not pertain to the assigned reading for that day.

- If you must be absent from class, you may submit your written response early (or late, if necessary) to receive credit for participation. If you have to miss class on a day when a written response is due, your response should be more detailed than usual— at least two pages double-spaced or one page single-spaced.

- You have three “free” absences during the semester. Please do not submit any documentation. I will simply mark those absences and will not ask any questions. If you miss a class, you may submit a written response to receive credit for participation (see above). If you miss a class for which no written response is due, please see me about an alternative make-up assignment.

- I will deduct 50-points (out of 250) from your class participation grade, for each additional class missed after the first three.
“Excused” absences (beyond the three free ones) will be granted only in the following cases: (1) if you have an official accommodation for a disability which specifically affects attendance, or (2) if you experience an illness or emergency situation (for which documentation must be provided). Please do not attend class if you have a fever or feel very ill. I urge you to see a doctor immediately if you have any flu-like symptoms. If you are diagnosed with flu or other infectious disease, please stay home for as long as your doctor advises.

CITI course in human research ethics 5% / 50

• By Oct 10, you must complete the CITI online training course in human research ethics. You will receive full credit (50 points) for successfully passing the course, regardless of your exact score in the course.
• Register at the CITI webpage and take the Group 2 (Social Behavioral Research) test. You may submit a printout of your CITI certification as proof of completion. There is a link to CITI webpage from the Purdue IRB webpage: http://www.purdue.edu/research/vpr/rschadmin/rschoversight/humans/edu.php
• If you have already completed the CITI course, you do not need to take it again. Just login to the website and print out a copy of the completion report.

Article presentations (4) 20% / 200 (50 each)

• On four occasions during the semester you will present an article to the class in a critical way and lead the discussion of the article. You should prepare a brief handout summarizing the points you plan to cover. Depending on the number of students in the class and the number of readings, some of the presentations will be individual and some may be together with a classmate. More details about article presentations will be given in a separate handout.

Critical Essay 15% / 150

• You will write one 8-10 page paper (double-spaced, including tables, graphs, examples, and references) addressing one of the controversies from the course readings. Your essay should summarize competing views and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each. Optionally, you may argue in favor of a particular approach or theory. Examples of controversies include: How reliable are informal judgments for addressing theoretical claims in syntax? Is magnitude estimation the most informative experimental measure of acceptability? How reliable are data collected using Amazon Mechanical Turk? Are some syntactic phenomena reducible to processing or pragmatic factors? Does gradient judgment data ever justify positing a gradient grammar? More details will be given on a separate document.

Term Paper 30% / 300

• The term paper will consist of a 15-25 page paper (double-spaced, including tables, graphs, examples, and references) on a topic of your choice in experimental syntax. Sentence materials or sample questionnaires may be included as appendices (not included in 25 page limit).
• The paper will propose an original experiment testing a research question of interest to you, preferably something related to your own dissertation or thesis. Although your topic should deal with a sentence-level language phenomenon (i.e. not segment-level phonology), you may approach it from a perspective other than formal syntax if you like (e.g., language acquisition, semantics, pragmatics, bilingualism, prosody, sentence comprehension, etc.).

• The paper must consist of the following components:
  • Introduction: literature review and theoretical issue(s) to be addressed.
  • Hypotheses: clear statement of specific predictions to be tested, including graphs depicting expected pattern of data.
  • Methods: detailed experimental design, including materials, procedure, and a description of the population of speakers to be tested.
  • Pilot Results and Discussion: a report and discussion of the data collected from three or more pilot subjects.

• The term paper will be due at 5pm on Tuesday, Dec 16 (in finals week). I will need a one-page topic proposal from you by Monday, Oct 20. Additional details of the term paper will be given on a separate document.

Term Paper Presentation

• Some time during the last two weeks of class or the final exam period, you will give a presentation of the term paper (20 minutes for presentation, 20 minutes for discussion). You should prepare a short handout. Powerpoint is optional.

• A note on IRB approval. Class projects do not normally require IRB approval. However, if you wish to use any of the participant data collected for this term paper in your dissertation and/or in a published paper, you must work together with your dissertation advisor to seek IRB approval before collecting any data. This process can take a few weeks. See the Purdue IRB webpage for details: http://www.purdue.edu/research/vpr/rschadmin/rschoversight/humans/approval.php

General Policies

Grading

• A+ = 970 and above; A = 930-969; A- = 900-929; B+ = 870-899; B = 830-869; B- = 800-829; C+ = 770-799; C = 730-769; C- = 700-729; D+ = 670-699; D = 630-669; D- = 600-629; F = below 600

Plagiarism and Cheating

• In writing your papers, please be sure to provide proper citation (including page numbers) for any information quoted or paraphrased from a published source.
• The University’s guidelines on plagiarism and cheating are listed in the brochure “Academic Integrity: A Guide for Students,” which is available online at: http://www.purdue.edu/odos/aboutodos/academicintegrity.php

Classroom Atmosphere

• Please share you ideas and opinions about the course material, and don’t be shy about asking questions. This is a small class, and its success depends on your active participation!

• Please show respect for the diverse backgrounds, experiences, opinions, and beliefs of others. Please help maintain an atmosphere that is both friendly and professional.

Late Assignments

• Late assignments will not be accepted without prior arrangement. If you feel that you will need an extension, please contact me well before the due date. The only exceptions to this would be for a sudden illness or emergency.

Getting Help

• If you have any questions about the course material or are having any kind of problems in the course, feel free to come discuss it with me. If you cannot make it to office hours, you can make an appointment. Also feel free to send email to me (ejfranci@purdue.edu) if you have questions that don’t require a meeting.

• If you need any kind of accommodation for a disability, it is your responsibility work with the Disability Resource Center to develop a plan for accommodations in your classes. Please meet with me during the first three weeks of class to discuss your accommodations. The DRC can be reached here: 765-494-1247, http://www.purdue.edu/drc

Readings

Required Texts


Supplemental Texts (on reserve in HSSE library)


**Preliminary List of Additional Readings**  (pdf files to be posted in Blackboard)


**In the Event of Emergency**

- **EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION PROCEDURES** are based on a simple concept – if you hear a fire alarm inside, proceed outside. If you hear a siren outside, proceed inside.

- Indoor Fire Alarms mean to stop class or research and immediately evacuate the building. Proceed to your Emergency Assembly Area away from building doors. Remain outside until police, fire, or other emergency response personnel provide additional guidance or tell you it is safe to leave.

- All Hazards Outdoor Emergency Warning Sirens mean to immediately seek shelter (Shelter in Place) in a safe location within the closest building. “Shelter in place” means seeking immediate shelter inside a building or University residence. This course of action may need to be taken during a tornado, a civil disturbance including a shooting or release of hazardous materials in the outside air. Once safely inside, find out more details about the emergency*. Remain in place until police, fire, or other emergency response personnel provide additional guidance or tell you it is safe to leave.

- In the event of a major campus emergency, course requirements, deadlines and grading percentages are subject to changes that may be necessitated by a revised semester calendar or other circumstances. In the event of emergency, I would first send announcements to the class email list and the Blackboard web page. You could also contact me by email (ejfranci@purdue.edu), or by phone to the English Department main office (494-3740).

- Refer to the Emergency Preparedness web site for additional information: [http://www.purdue.edu/emergency_preparedness](http://www.purdue.edu/emergency_preparedness)
# Experimental Syntax: Fall 2014 Timetable

(AP = article presentation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Readings (preliminary schedule)</th>
<th>Presentations &amp; Assignments</th>
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W: Myers 2009a  
F: Schütze 2011                                                   |                            |
| Sept 1-5       | Acceptability vs. grammaticality; Subject and task-related factors in intuitive judgments | M: No class. Labor Day  
W: Cowart 1997, ch. 1-2  
F: Schütze 1996, ch. 1-5                                           | AP 1-2                      |
| Sept 8-12      | Experiment design and procedures                                       | M: Cowart 1997, ch. 3-5;  
W: Schütze 1996, ch. 6-7  
F: Arunachalam 2013                                                   | AP 3-5                      |
W: Featherston 2005  
F: Francis & Matthews 2006                                            | AP 6-8                      |
| Sept 22-26     | Distinguishing the effects of grammar and processing                   | M: Goodluck & Zweig 2013 and Lin 2012  
W: Hofmeister et al 2013b  
F: Phillips 2013a                                                       | AP 9-11                     |
W: Christensen et al 2013  
F: Casasanto et al 2010                                                 | AP 12-14                    |
| Oct 6-10       | Wh-constraints, prosody, and pragmatics                                 | M: Kitagawa & Fodor 2006  
W: Ćabajewska 2008  
F: Ambridge & Goldberg 2008                                            | CITI certification due Oct 10  
AP 15-17                                                                |
| Oct 13-17      | Research ethics in experimental language research                      | LSA ethics statement;  
Purdue ethics statement; sample IRB documents; other readings TBA                      | No class Oct. 13, Fall Break                                           |
|   | Date       | Topic                                      | Reading                          | Term paper proposal due Oct 20
|---|------------|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------
| 9 | Oct 20-24  | Constructing questionnaires                | M: Cowart 1997, ch. 6-9           | AP 18-19                    
|   |            | Data summaries and statistics              | W: Cowart 1997, ch. 10-12         |                             
|   |            | (Bring laptops this week if you can.)      | F: more hands-on practice         |                             
| 10| Oct 27-31  | Reliability of formal vs. informal         | M: Gibson & Fedorenko 2013a       | AP 20-22                    
|   |            | judgment tasks                             | W: Sprouse et al 2013             |                             
|   |            |                                            | and Sprouse & Almeida 2013        |                             
|   |            |                                            | F: Gibson & Fedorenko 2013b       |                             
|   |            |                                            | W: Sprouse 2011a                  | AP 23-25                    
|   |            |                                            | F: Gibson et al 2011 and Sprouse  |                             
|   |            |                                            | 2011b                            |                             
| 12| Nov 10-14  | Topic TBA                                  |                                 | AP 26-28                    
| 13| Nov 17-21  | Topic TBA                                  |                                 | AP 29-31                    
| 14| Nov 24-28  | Topic TBA                                  |                                 | No class Nov 26-28,        
|   |            |                                            |                                 | Thanksgiving break         
| 15| Dec 1-5    | Term paper presentations                   |                                 | Term paper presentations   
| 16| Dec 8-12   | Term paper presentations                   |                                 | Term paper presentations   
| Finals week | Dec 15-19 | Term paper presentations continued in final exam period (date, time TBA) | Term paper due Dec 16             | Term paper due Dec 16 |